

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-7. (Canceled)

8. (Previously Presented) An isolated bacterial strain deposited with the C.N.C.M. on December 5, 2002, under the number I-2962.

Claims 9-11. (Canceled)

12. (Currently Amended) An isolated bacterial strain which is an *Exiguobacterium lactigenes* strain

said isolated bacterial strain comprising a 16S rRNA sequence of SEQ ID NO:1,

wherein the genomic DNA of said isolated bacterial strain is capable of

hybridizing with at least 70% of the genomic DNA of the strain deposited~~said isolated~~

~~bacterial strain further comprising a DNA sequence, at least 70% of which is capable of~~

~~hybridizing with genomic or plasmid DNA of the strain deposited~~ on December 5, 2002,

under the No. I-2962, with the Collection Nationale de Cultures de Microorganismes (C.N.C.M.),

said isolated bacterial strain being thermoresistant, saccharolytic and amylolytic and/or capable of producing L(+) lactate, and

having growth properties at temperatures of 40 to 50°C, at a pH of 5.4 to 9.15,

with an optimum for growth at 45°C, at a pH of approximately 7, and

a guanine plus cytosine content of its DNA of approximately 50 mol%.